

A QUAIN OLD
NOVA SCOTIAN JUDGE'S
VIEW
OF THE
ROMAN GOVERNOR'S QUESTION
"WHAT IS TRUTH?"

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WHAT IS TRUTH?

"Look you, who comes here?"

"A young man and an old in solemn talk."

Shakespeare.

THE residence of an old judge, with whom I have been making a short *séjour*, is situate near the beautiful basin of Annapolis, which is connected by a narrow strait with the Bay of Fundy. As the judge and I sauntered by the shore of the basin, the waters of which sparkled in the sun's rays, sleeping calmly between the full and the ebb of the tide, we observed, propelled by noiseless paddles, a little squadron of bark canoes proceeding, in line, to a burying-ground, there to deposit the remains of one of the MicMacs whose unit had been subtracted from the number of that degraded, but not uninteresting tribe, already much reduced by the influences of civilization, and, especially, by the use of ardent spirits which the whites introduced among them. In a few minutes the canoes stranded so lightly as scarcely to displace a pebble on the beach, and by the debarked Indians were

drawn up, and left on the shore. In order to witness unobtrusively the approaching ceremony, we retired to a grove at hand. The funeral train was marshalled by an aged MicMac with order and decency. The coffin, of unpainted pine, not rudely made, was borne to a grave silently excavated, and the body, placed in it, was covered with mould. The whole party then knelt around the grave, their movements being directed by the chief, whose long flowing locks, thin, sinewy hands, uplifted and expanded, and closed eyes, formed an interesting spectacle. Then arose with untaught harmony from their deep, guttural voices, in a dialect unknown to us, a solemn chant, which was followed by a prayer, the sincerity and devotion of which could not be doubted. The ceremony ended, the Indians reembarked, and paddled away as silently as they came.

After they were gone, we came forth from our retreat, and loitered at the spot of interment. "This turf covers," said the judge, "our red brother who there rests from his labours." I remarked, "He was, I suppose, 'a light unto himself;' but how far, think you, will his responsibility, if such awaits him, be affected by 'his works that follow him,' which were influenced by no higher principle than the instinct of the bear or the deer that he slew for food?" "As to the purpose," replied my friend, "which in the moral economy of the world the life and works of the

poor savage were designed to subserve, I could probably gather no information from reason, or from revelation; so that I shall leave your question to the hereafter, which will, no doubt, answer it, and some others of far greater importance that perplex us now. I have learned 'not to exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.' Nevertheless, as your query seems to imply a doubt in your mind as to what lies beyond, in 'the undiscovered country,' I shall inflict on you a homily over this grave which may help you to resolve it, if it exists. I have been long anchored in the creed which my good old mother taught me, by her knee, from our Church catechism. To travel out of that involves a danger of being 'puffed up,' as St. Paul calls it. There were such inflations in his days as there are in ours. If you, young man, are looking to your own intellect alone for an answer to the great question of your future, you will die with it unanswered; and you may find, when the veil is lifted, that you have been 'stumbling on the dark mountains,' when it would have been better for you to have accepted the proffered 'light of the world.' He who stood before the Roman Governor, when the latter, in the very noon-day blaze of the human intellect, anxiously, or despondingly, or derisively, asked of the former, '*What is truth?*' was, Himself, the only reliable answer that has ever been given to that question.

“Not to speak of the profound wisdom of His doctrine, or of the marvellous eloquence of His life, we may remember, that He declared Himself to be ‘the Light of the world.’

“It is of infinite moment to you and to me to determine, each for himself, whether he is truly enlightened by that light as his accepted guide of life, or whether it is to him but ‘a light shining in darkness that comprehendeth it not.’

“Demonstration of the truth of Christianity there never can be, from what must necessarily be the nature of a Divine revelation, and from what we know to be the nature of man. Evidence of some other kind, therefore, must satisfy a mind inquiring on that point, or it must remain unsatisfied.

“It is clearly the teaching of the Book which Christians regard as Divine, that effectual conviction of the origin of the revelation which it contains must be produced, if at all, not by logic of the head, but by what I venture to call *logic of the heart*. Moreover, such appears to me to be the only means by which, as man is constituted, the truth of a revelation of that which lies beyond the reach of sense and experience can be so established in man’s apprehension, as to influence and regulate, as a principle, his conduct.

“Love, or gratitude—a thing purely of the heart—is declared by the great Teacher to be the condition necessary for so receiving Him as to obtain

redemption by Him. He said, 'Greater *love* hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' 'If ye *love* me, keep my commandments.' 'As the Father hath loved me, so have I *loved* you.' 'He that *loveth* father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.'

"He speaks of that same affection, also, as related to *evidence* of the Divine authority of his doctrine. These are his words:—'He that *loveth* me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and *manifest myself to him*.' After He had said, 'My doctrine is not mine but his that sent me,' he added, 'If any man will do [*i.e.* as the Greek is, *desireth to do*] his will, he shall *know* of the doctrine whether it be of God.'

"The condition on which that knowledge is thus declared to depend, is not an intellectual one. It is the existence of a sincere desire to do the will of God, arising from the love of God—an affection of the heart! With the source of that principle—perfectly clear from Scripture—we are not, at present, concerned.

"Again, when our Lord said, 'of such' [little children] 'is the kingdom of Heaven,' it was as if He had said, 'If ye would attain to that kingdom, the process by which you may expect to be convinced that I am 'the way' that conducts to it, is not an exercise of your reasoning faculty, but it is the swaying of your hearts toward me from simple, trusting love, as little children, incapable of the

logic of the mind, are drawn by their loving instincts towards their earthly parents.' The Divine source of the doctrine in question is thus pronounced to be provable by *heart logic*, which is but another form of words to express 'the law written on the heart !'

"In the texts of the New Scriptures just quoted, we have, in effect, Divine love appealing to human hearts. Observe how human hearts have responded, and are now responding to that appeal. The Psalmist, in prophetic anticipation, most likely, of what I have noticed, exclaimed, "Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my *heart*, and my portion for ever.'

"It is, undeniably, true, that that same response has, in every hour since the great act was enacted on Calvary, been made by human hearts, so convinced of what they regarded as the 'inestimable gift,' as neither to demand, nor to need a mere intellectual assurance of the reality of it. Of that response the heart-felt sincerity and the earnestness have been proved in every case by the self-denying devotion of a life, and by a faith in the hour of death stronger than death—in a word, by a nature changed from selfishness to love.

"An enlightened mind, rigidly scrutinizing the outward manifestations of such a regenerated nature, and *seeing that such an effect cannot be ascribed*

to mere human causes, cannot but consider as great a miracle to have been thus operated, as was the feeding of the five thousand by the few loaves and fishes. It were as rational to refer the last as the first to human influences. Is it consistent with sound reasoning, then, when the subject discussed is the evidence of Revelation, to ignore, as some do, a heart-logic which claims so high an original, and has produced such results ?

Here, interrupting my venerable friend, I said, "Admitting the truth of what you have urged, I feel, nevertheless, that, in regard to the subject of your remarks, a cultivated intellect, where the heart is untouched, demands evidence of another kind; I am, therefore, curious to hear what you have to say on the point of mental conviction, or of evidence strictly such."

"In my opinion," he replied, "an honest mind will not make that demand in vain."

"We have," he continued to say, "in the Hebrew Scriptures, in which (it may be observed by the way) God's communication of His nature and attributes would appear to be progressive, beginning with a declaration of eternal self-existence, and, under the Gospel dispensation, ending in a Being, who taught, on earth, as a human impersonation of the Godhead, a narrative of a transaction, in which Jehovah is represented as an actor with a then living man. It expressly points to something future of interest to the

whole human race. It is out of place, and without any intelligible meaning or purpose where it appears in the history with which it is connected, if viewed in mere relation to the subject of the history with whom God is represented as so acting. The narrative appeared in the same place and connection where and in which it is now read, ages before an event of then future occurrence took place, to which alone of all future events recorded in human annals it can be intelligibly referred.

"Now, in view of the fact of such pre-existence of that narrative, and of the incidents, connections, and results that I have stated, I say, that that now existing narrative with such incidents, connections, and results, constitutes *evidence* of a pre-determined connection between the narrative and the event.

"Let us," he added, "try out this by considering—and a close consideration of all the circumstances is most material—that narrative.

"What is related by St. Luke in his statement of the journey to Emmaus suggested to my mind what I am about to submit to yours.

"Admitting the difficulties connected with the Greek documents which high criticism and elaborate historical research have raised, and not shutting the eyes to other difficulties that with more or less weight, according to the degree of faith, or the acuteness of intellect, perplex many minds, I, nevertheless, maintain, that here is evidence of a

kind and of a cogency that ought to satisfy the most highly trained mind, that the Gospel story is of supernatural origin as regards the great central figure of it, and that the testimony it bears to the atoning character of His death is true. Bear in mind that, if that narrative, viewed as I view it, is evidence for the purpose indicated, it is but a selected portion of a large class of evidence of a kindred nature that conduces to the same result.

"In common, no doubt, with most professing Christians, I believe what I have thus selected to 'concern Jesus : ' but I do not pretend to present in a new aspect a single feature of it. I aim at your conviction by means of the way in which I put the familiar old story, with its adjuncts and relations.

"The 'Christus' of whom Tacitus wrote as crucified under Pilate, is identical with the Christ of the Gospels. He is in one of these recorded to have declared, after his resurrection, that the Jewish prophets, had spoken of him, and had predicted that he should suffer, and resume his glory.

"Let any man of intelligence seek for evidence derived from the old Scriptures read with the Greek documents, that the Jesus of these last was what he is therein represented to have been, and that he suffered as represented. If, considering that his faculties are limited, and that he is conducting inquiry in a subject which treats of the unseen and the unknown, that inquirer finds, that

a Hebrew prophet or patriarch did, in any way, in that which was a remote future to him, point to a remarkable person, and to remarkable incidents connected with him, that are related in the Greek Scriptures, and to none other person and incidents that are the subjects of history—he cannot in such conditions reasonably refuse his assent to the general truth of those Scriptures, so far as they profess to refer to that particular person.

“I will suppose that inquirer to have directed his attention to the narrative of the Abrahamic sacrifice, and to the incidents of Abraham’s life connected therewith, as recorded in Genesis. That narrative was where it is now found ages before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. It could not, therefore, have been forged after the event to which I suppose it to refer—no human prescience could have foreseen that event—no state of mundane things co-existed with the date of the narrative that could have suggested it as a possible result of that state of things.

“I offer these preliminary observations, and those that follow, before proceeding to examine the narrative.

“We find from the previous history of Abraham that a trial of his obedience, *considered merely as such*,—especially a terribly severe one,—would not seem to have been necessary, for Jehovah is recorded to have said of him, ‘I know him that he will command his children and his household after

him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him.'

"We read that Jehovah, before the destruction of Sodom, said, 'shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do?' The reason follows:— 'seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.' Surely, in view of this, it is far from improbable, that the Lord would not altogether hide from Abraham 'the thing that he did'—*i.e.* designed to do—in order to the accomplishment of that very promise which is indicated in the reason. We have the more ground for thinking that Jehovah did not hide from the patriarch that thing, if we regard the fact, that, in the sequel of the virtual sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham, as his last act in the wonderful drama, named the place 'Jehovah Jireh'—'the Lord will see or provide.'

"Can we reach the import of these words? I think we can, by a fair and natural construction, with the aid of the context. Isaac had said 'Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' and Abraham had answered, 'My son, God *will provide* himself a lamb for a burnt-offering.' After this, God had provided for virtual sacrifice Isaac, and for an actual substituted one a ram. Abraham, in view of what *had thus passed*,—after God *had provided*

the ram—proceeds to name the place, and call it—(what? not by words importing that ‘there God *had provided,*’ but) ‘God *will provide*’—i.e. will provide a *then future* sacrifice—a *then future* lamb for a burnt-offering. Can any other reasonable interpretation of the words used be given?

“We, in reading the story, distinguish between the condition of the patriarch’s feelings as we try to enter into them, when he received and acted on the command, on the one hand, and what we can conceive to have been in the Divine mind when the command was given, on the other. In this view there is nothing in the nature of the command that is revolting to human sentiment. There existed not from the first a Divine purpose that Abraham should slay his son. It is not, therefore, necessary to import into the case for an explanation of the narrative any considerations derived from Abraham’s probable familiarity with human sacrifices before he became a monotheist. There is, nothing, therefore, in the narrative that could be supposed to give a sanction to human sacrifices.

“It is obvious to a Christian why Abraham should be made to feel the intensity of a father’s sufferings under the circumstances, and why he should have some intimation given him that there existed a tremendous necessity for some such a sacrifice.

“That Abraham should have regarded the promise in Isaac to refer to mere temporal blessings is inconceivable: but it is not unreasonable to sup-

pose that he was thus made to see that Jehovah would provide in a descendant of Isaac a sacrifice by which 'all the nations upon earth would be blessed.'

"To consider, as some commentators have strangely done, that the purpose was to teach Isaac the virtue of suffering, is violently improbable. Why should an innocent man be therefore made a victim, and that by special command of Jehovah? History does not present an instance of an innocent person being represented as doomed to suffer death for such a purpose by the command of the true God, or of any false one.

"Let us now notice the features of the narrative in order to see if this portion of the Old Scriptures concerns the Jesus Christ of the Greek Scriptures. I use the word 'virtual' but once. Where it is to be supplied afterwards will be apparent. *When the features referred to are indicated, it will be unnecessary for me to notice the Greek parallels.* Those features may be presented thus:—Jehovah—the Heavenly Father—appoints the sacrifice. A human father virtually sacrifices his son (brought into life preternaturally) his only son, the son he loved. He consents to, and takes part in the sacrifice. 'The father took the fire in his hand, and the knife.' 'The father stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.'

"The son dies, and lives after his death. 'And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the

knife to slay his son. *Thus the son died.* 'And Abraham took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.' *Thus the son that was sacrificed was released from the bonds of death, and lived again.* 'Even from the dead his father received him in a figure.' The son dies by violence, and on the wood—on wood that he is made to bear to the place of sacrifice. 'And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son.' 'And Abraham laid Isaac on the altar, upon the wood, and bound Isaac his son.' The son consents to be the victim. After the father had replied to the son, 'My son, God will provide himself a lamb,' the son, physically able effectually to resist, submissively consents to become that lamb, and to be bound, and laid upon the wood. Observe, too, as showing the perfect agreement between the father and the son, it is said—not merely once, but it is repeated—'and they went both of them together.' They go both together, and they *alone*, to the place of sacrifice. 'Of the *people* there were none with me.'

"The son, thus sacrificed, was the previously appointed type and channel 'of blessings for all the nations of the earth.'

"The sacrifice would seem to have been completed on the third day from that on which the father leads out the son for the sacrifice. Such appears to me to be the effect of the words of the

narrative. During the interval, and up to the moment when the son is unbound, he remains under the sentence of death. On the third day the son is released.

“ When the sacrifice is finished, the blessing is renewed; and, then and there, as if to prevent a misconception in supposing it to have referred to mere temporal benefits, these last are mentioned, and then we have superadded the words, ‘and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.’ In the sequel Abraham foresees a provision made by Jehovah for a future sacrifice.

“ We may not, perhaps, necessarily infer from the narrative that the sacrifice was thus shown to be of an *atoning* character. Abraham, however, if he then ‘saw Christ’s day,’ must have viewed it in that light. We may note, also, that the sacrifice is represented as a ‘burnt offering.’ Such is mentioned six times in the thirteen verses of the narrative, and it is mentioned only in two or three other places in Genesis. If Abraham understood that kind of sacrifice in the sense made to attach to it in Leviticus, he must have known that his son in the transaction was made by Divine appointment an expiating victim. ‘And he’ (the offerer) ‘shall put his hand upon the head of *the burnt offering*; and it shall be accepted for him, to make atonement for him.’

“ And, now, let me put to you this question:— Looking to history developed since Abraham’s

day, has any human being, *save one*, appeared on the theatre of this world, whose character and career were such as can be said to have even conduced to 'bless all the nations upon earth'?

"In the whole history of man, *not including the Greek Scriptures*, there is no other instance beside that in the Hebrew narrative recorded, so far as I know, of an innocent man consenting to become a sacrificial victim upon an altar raised by his father, upon an intimation received from that father that a God required, or approved his submission to the sacrifice. If this be true, it is inferential as to a connection between the Abrahamic sacrifice and that on Calvary.*

"It appears to me but one explanation can be given of all this.

"Supposing the narrative not to point to something which is not on the surface of it, how is it to be explained? I assert that, on that supposition, no reasonable explanation of it can be given.

"I make this assertion advisedly. The promise declared in the narrative after the act in obedience was not a result, or a reward of that act. This is shown by the fact that the narrative but repeats the very promise that had been declared before the act.†

* Judges xi. 36 is clearly a case essentially different from that under review. If a parallel, it would strengthen the general argument.

† Compare ch. xviii. ver. 18, with ch. xxii. ver. 18.

“Regarding the purpose to have been a pre-intimation of the mode in which the promise would be performed (and the point of the narrative is expressed in the twelfth verse) then, the trial, so fearful, especially in view of the previously proved signal obedience of the tried one—then the solemnity of the transaction—then the special circumstances, including a designation of the place of sacrifice—then the submission of Isaac—the provision of a ram—the actual burnt offering—the naming of the place by Abraham—all become intelligible and significant. The reverse is true, if the sole purpose had relation to *obedience*.

“I have referred to the twelfth verse. It is most striking. I read it thus, adding to the words others that they suggest :—‘seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me,’ *I thus disclose to you that I will not withhold my son, my only son, from thee and thy seed.*’

“No man, in face of what the Greek documents show, could reasonably assert that Jesus, being a mere man, as the assertion would suppose, did, from enthusiasm, procure himself to be a sufferer, in view of the narrative, and as a self-designed antitype of Isaac as the latter is presented in it. Jesus, on the assumption of his mere humanity, could not truly (I say it with reverence) have represented, or sanely have believed, himself to be a subject of the prophecy in question. Moreover, the negative testimony of the Gospels

would refute the supposed assertion. Neither our Lord, nor any one of his followers, during His life ever, expressly, or by necessary implication, adverted to the Abrahamic sacrifice. Jesus did not notice it, even when He declared Himself in His reference to the brazen serpent to be the fulfilment of prophecy ; nor when He spoke of Abraham having seen his day ; nor when speaking of Himself as the Son of God. Beside if such a position could command any support, the question would still remain: viz., was the narrative written in order that a Jew *might*, ages afterwards, appropriate it to himself as the Son of God ?

“ In this connection, mark the effect of the passage occurring in St. John’s Gospel:—‘ The next day, John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith,’ [and this was before the event on Calvary], ‘ Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world !’ Observe, we do not read in the context, ‘ *and in him will be fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet,*’ or ‘ *in him will be accomplished what Abraham saw, or heard, or did.*’ No ! it is a simple announcement made to the Priests and Levites by the Evangelist, without any *express* reference to the past, that the man before them was ‘ the Lamb of God,’ and the ‘ Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.’ That there is here an implied reference to ‘ the paschal lamb,’ confirms my view of the effect of the narrative.

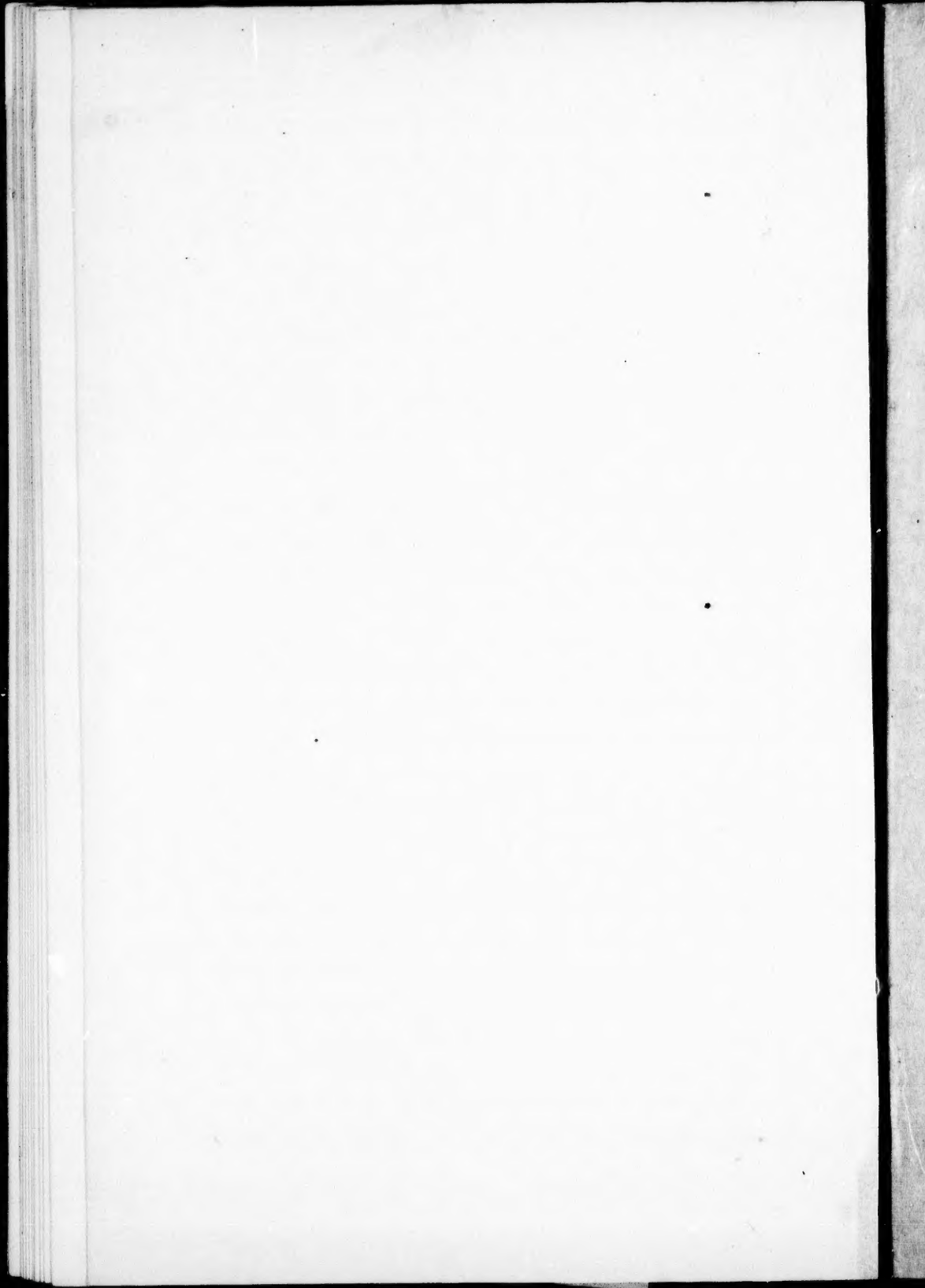
“ Here, let me pause, and ask,—Was He of whom John so spoke, one of the seed of Abraham? Is taking away the sin of a world a blessing to all the nations of the earth? Is any other event registered on the page of history that can be so characterized?

“ It is not necessary to notice the various views that have been taken by commentators of the purpose of the narrative in question. Many have considered, as I do, that Jehovah had preordained that He, who, afterwards, as Christ was crucified, should, although innocent, suffer, and had designed, further, that by means of the transaction related in the narrative that then future sacrifice should be in some degree revealed, or adumbrated to the mind of Abraham.

“ It is easy to conceive why that representative Hebrew should have been the selected one of a selected race, so to receive a pre-intimation of the greatest event that history records.

“ A result of all this is to my mind unquestionable evidence that the patriarch in the particular transaction ‘saw Christ’s day’ through the vista of the centuries interposed between it and the Great Sacrifice. If he did, it was by the operation of a miracle as real and as great as any related in the Greek documents !”

“ Beau Site,” Cannes,
11th March, 1878.



SUPPLEMENTAL.

The "old judge" may be assumed thus to express a summary of the preceding views:—"The crucifixion of Jesus is a fact supported by secular testimony.

"Four documents exist that purport to represent Him as dying on the cross, and rising from the dead. In one of these He is reported to have said to two of His followers, aware of His crucifixion, but doubting of His resurrection, that certain Jewish Scriptures, then and long before His birth existing, were written 'concerning Him.'

"In another one of these documents He is reported to have said that 'Abraham saw His day'—and that, without specifying when and where.

"Looking to the source thus indicated for evidence to prove the general truth of the documents, and especially in relation to the question of the

supernatural involved, I have found it in 'the narrative,' *unless the many and the particular coincidences therein with the circumstances stated in the documents of the crucifixion and resurrection were, as regards the narrative, undesigned and merely accidental.*

"If *that* can be predicated of them, reasonably, by a sound mind, in view of all the circumstances, my argument on the point goes for nothing. If that cannot be so predicated, the argument stands, and shows that '*the day*' was seen in the transaction narrated."

The judge would probably have to qualify his words put interrogatively on page 14, and concede that the place *may have been named* as a memorial of the provision that had been made.

In note * on page 18 for i. read xi.

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